

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, earlier today, the President spoke to the Chamber of Commerce in what some have described as an effort to make nice with the business community. I will leave others to analyze what the speech means politically. The first concern of the American people is what it will mean for the economy. As I have said before, what the President says matters a lot less than what he does.

So we will just have to wait and see whether the administration's actions support its rhetoric. And it is in that spirit that I would like to suggest one thing the President could do immediately, with Republican support, to show he is serious about jobs and the economy. He could work with us to pass free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama that have been languishing for years now.

We welcome the President's support for the South Korea Free Trade Agreement which has earned strong bipartisan support. But by failing to show the same commitment in passing these two other free trade agreements, the President is missing out on an important opportunity to do something good for the economy and for jobs.

The President says he wants to double U.S. exports in 5 years. Free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama would go a long way toward meeting that goal—and creating jobs here in America—by opening markets in Latin America.

In my view, the time for delay on these two agreements is over. The President needs to do more than promise to "pursue" these agreements, as he did today. He should work with Congress to pass these two agreements and sign them into law.

This should be an easy one. Colombia is a strong strategic ally in South America, and it has made great strides in addressing the concerns of labor union critics here in the U.S. It has come a long way. We should not walk away from Colombia now. As for Panama, our two nations have had strong strategic and economic ties for years. This agreement would only strengthen those bonds and build on them.

As America sits on the sidelines, our competitors around the world, including the EU and Canada, are moving forward to lower barriers to trade and increase access for their businesses and workers. This is unacceptable, particularly for an administration that is claiming as its top priority to "win the future."

It won't be enough for Republicans and it shouldn't be enough for the business community to allow the adminis-

tration's trade agenda to start and end with South Korea. We should be passing all pending trade agreements and inking new ones on a bipartisan basis, even when it requires the President bringing his own party along.

We have heard Secretary Clinton, Senator BAUCUS, and Ambassador Kirk all express support for submitting a Colombia FTA to Congress. But the President's own pronouncements continue to fall short. It is not enough for the President to say good things about free trade while siding with labor bosses over job creators and the vast majority of American workers who do not belong to unions and who would largely benefit from opening markets overseas. We shouldn't allow labor union bosses to have veto power over economic policies that benefit us all.

So the question is: will the President allow our allies in South America to continue waiting for us to move forward, or will he send the message that America stands by her allies and is prepared to do something good for American workers, good for the American economy, and good for key allies. Congress is ready to pass these two deals today. It is time for the President to commit to the same.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mr. JOHANNES. Mr. President, I compliment the minority leader on his comments on trade. I wish to speak in morning business on the same topic. I will not have to speak long because I have talked about this many times since I joined the Senate over 2 years ago.

Today I will focus on the U.S.-Colombia trade agreement. This agreement was signed by both the United States and Colombia on November 22, 2006. It has been around many years. It is expected to create several thousand jobs. Yet for 5 years, to the detriment of U.S. exporters and job seekers, policymakers have punted on this important trade agreement. The Obama administration has been sitting on the sidelines watching other countries slowly chip away at U.S. competitiveness in the Colombian marketplace. Our friends to the north in Canada and to the south in Mexico wisely negotiated new agreements with Colombia. They saw the void U.S. companies and workers should have been filling and acted to fill that void themselves. I believe it is time we stop watching other countries make the moves that have been teed up for this country for about 5 years.

Implementing the agreement would increase U.S. exports by more than \$½ billion annually and create almost 4,000 much needed jobs in the United States. Simply stated, passing this agreement would help to improve our economy.

In last year's State of the Union Address, we heard our President say:

If America sits on the sidelines while other nations sign trade deals, we will lose the chance to create jobs on our shores.

I applauded his comments. I applauded his desire to increase exports. But, unfortunately, no action was taken on the President's words.

During this last year's State of the Union Address, the President again acknowledged the need for the Colombia trade agreement by saying:

We will strengthen our trade relations with key partners like South Korea and Panama and Colombia.

Once again, these words will ring hollow with no action. Yet again today, in a much touted speech to the Chamber of Commerce, the President talked about pursuing the Colombia trade agreement. I must admit, I asked the question: What on Earth is left to pursue? The agreement was signed nearly 5 years ago. It is ready for approval. All the President needs to do is submit it for our action. If the President thinks there was more pursuing to do, what have we been waiting for the past couple of years? Why has not the administration pursued whatever it is they think needs pursuing for now over 2 years?

Americans who are out of work know this administration is missing an opportunity to say to thousands of Americans: You have a job. Our job creators are waiting. My hope is the President stands behind his remarks today.

This is a golden opportunity for the President to send a signal that his words do have meaning and to show that we can, in fact, work together in a bipartisan way. He could submit the Colombia trade agreement to Congress for approval today and send an enormously powerful message that when he says "pursue," he means action, not stall.

Folks from my State are anxiously awaiting approval of this agreement as are folks from around the country. We should all be reminded that workers and businesses in our home States will benefit from the Colombia trade agreement. Our farmers and ranchers would benefit from the elimination of tariffs on more than 77 percent of agricultural goods. American workers will see more of their products sold as 76 percent of Colombian tariffs on our industrial goods are eliminated immediately. No doubt about it, this agreement will have a real impact on Nebraskans and other Americans who work hard every day to make a better life for their families.

Let me share a couple of examples of Nebraskans who want to see the U.S.-Colombia trade agreement ratified. Take Nebraska-based manufacturer Valmont Industries, for example. Valmont has loyal customers in Colombia who buy its irrigation pivots. Currently, Colombia imposes a 15-percent duty or tax on those pivot systems. This would be eliminated by the Colombia trade agreement. If the 15-percent duty is, in fact, eliminated, Valmont estimates they would gain market share against European competitors and add 10 to 15 new jobs in Nebraska alone.